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The Post-Industrial and the Urban Village: A Study of Land and Space in Beijing's Caochangdi Art District

Ke Li

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**The Post-Industrial and the Urban Village:
A study of land and space in Beijing's Caochangdi Art District**

Li, Ke

Academic Director: Lu, Yuan
Advisor: Pei, Dianqing

Columbia University
Urban Studies
Beijing, China

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Abstract

Arts districts have traditionally been associated with industrial areas that have been reconstructed to fit post-industrial economies. From Tate Modern in the U.K. to 798 in Beijing, abandoned factories have been refitted into cultural clusters. Yet, there is a research gap when concerning arts district in less traditional spaces. This study examines how this framework applies in Beijing's Caochangdi art district, aiming to understand how place-specific factors influence the development of an arts district and what Western gentrification theory looks like in a Chinese light. During the month of May 2014, I conducted twenty interviews, including nine with members of the art community in Caochangdi, nine with residents and workers in the village and members of the village committee, as well as those in academia specializing in the topic of urban villages. Numerous site visits were conducted, as well as visits to neighboring art districts of 798, Heiqiao, and Huantie.

Caochangdi, an arts district founded in a rural, instead of post-industrial, space, reveals that the development of an arts district as a place-bounded process. Historical land ownership rights, the conception of the space as primarily a place for living, and the illegality of the structures in the village according to land laws, all serve to mediate the pace of development of the arts district. In contrast to industrial spaces like 798 with unified management and control, villagers and residents have claim to space in ways that slow down commercialization. Artists feed into the migrant waves already flocked to Caochangdi, contributing to altering rural lifestyles and economics. The relationship between the urban village and the arts district, and the various manifestations this occurs, illuminate that far from following a Western model of development, Caochangdi is heavily influenced by its localized, historical environment.

Keywords: Urban and Regional Planning; Development Studies; Architecture

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Situated between the Fifth Ring Road and the Airport Expressway, Caochangdi is an urban village lying on the periphery of the city of Beijing. The village is home to around a thousand native villagers, tens of thousands of migrant laborers, cab drivers, recent graduates, and shopkeepers. Yet what distinguishes the area from the hundreds of urban villages, or *chengzhongcun*, in and around peripheral Beijing is that, juxtaposed with the narrow dirt streets, makeshift fruit markets, and a disordered mingling of ad-hoc structures, is a community of internationally-based art galleries and studios resting in its midst. Caochangdi Art District, boasting the likes of Swiss-based Galerie Urs Meile, Three Shadows Photography Art Centre, and the personal studios of one of the country's most controversial artists, Ai Weiwei, has found an unexpected location on the outskirts of China's capital. While the Western model of arts district development typically occurs in disinvested urban cores, with its post-industrial spaces, the unique positioning of Caochangdi challenges the perception that arts-led gentrification and arts districts follow a globalized prototype of development. Instead, the trajectory of the Caochangdi art district is entangled with a highly localized historical and political background specific to the Chinese conception of land ownership. Unlike in 798, with its industrial past, Caochangdi Art District is situated on the liminal space between the urban and the rural, and this built environment, and subsequent policies around the built environment, has mediated the development of the arts district and its relationships with its surroundings.

Interwoven relationships between the urban village and the arts district means that the influences are bidirectional and multilayered. Historical land ownership rights, the activity and density of the urban village, the conception of the space as primarily a place for living, and the illegality of the structures in the village according to land laws, all serve to mediate the pace of development of the arts district. In contrast to industrial spaces like 798 with its

unified management and control, villagers and residents have claim to the space in ways that slow down commercialization. Though the two environments appear physically separate in their built environments, there exists a balanced coexistence. Artists feed into the migrant waves already flocked to Caochangdi, contributing to altering rural lifestyles and economics. The relationship between the urban village and the arts district, and the various manifestations this occurs, reveal that far from following a Western model of development, Caochangdi is heavily influenced by its localized, historical environment.

Theoretical Grounding

The theoretical basis of this study is largely situated in the works on cultural production by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, as well as other research extending the idea of the interplay between cultural and economic capital to space and claims to space (Ley 2003; Zukin 1995, 2010). Bourdieu posits that, while the world of art and the world of industrialists are constantly interacting and influencing one another, they possess fundamentally different value systems. Existing mainly outside the reach of commercialization, the world of artists operates on a system of aesthetic and symbolic values for artwork that is divorced from its profit value, and in this, exhibits “considerable autonomy particularly in its criteria for recognition and prestige” (Ley 2003, 2531). In this romantic notion, artists are marked as an “anti-bourgeois, anti-conformist” group that distains the market and commodification of their works in economic terms (Ley 2003, 2533). Yet, although artists typically exist in a condition of voluntary poverty, the aesthetic disposition is in itself a marker of membership in the dominant class, arising, typically, out of origins in the middle class and high levels of education (Ley 2003, 2533). Bourdieu distinguishes artists as a dominated sector due to their low economic capital, yet a dominated sector belonging to the dominant class with high social and, in particular, cultural capital.

Ley extends Bourdieu's arguments on cultural and economic capital to the sphere of space. While artists often seek spaces of residence in locations that are cheaper and exist outside developed, commercialized areas, rejecting spaces of high economic capital, industrialists and capitals see the value in high cultural capital (Ley 2003, 2535). Under this framework, a cause of gentrification is the valorization of the aesthetic disposition and high cultural capital into economic capital. Thus, the common process of gentrification begins with an area of low cultural and economic capital, the moving in of artists with high cultural capital but low economic capital, and subsequently the influx of professionals and industrialists with high economic capital and low cultural capital.

The effects of art on space have been studied in depth by urban sociologists and geographers. While one camp of researchers view the economic development correlated with culture from a positive angle, such as Richard Florida's influential 2002 work, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, which promotes the 'creative class' as regenerative agents for disinvested urban cores and economic boons for the city, drawing in a talented class of professionals, others approach the dialogue of arts and economic redevelopment with a more critical tone.

The changes accompanying cultural districts often occurs as industrial areas are reconstructed to fit post-industrial economies, including the creative economy. This study examines how this framework applies in Beijing's art districts, specifically Caochangdi art district, aiming to understand how place-specific factors influence this gentrification, looking at how Beijing's political situation influences the development of these art districts, which unique players are involved, and what Western gentrification theory looks like in a Chinese light. Jennifer Currier's (2008) work on the 798 Arts District have explicated significantly on many of these factors, addressing briefly the topic of gentrification in a wider argument on Beijing's use of the arts district in its increasingly globalized "urban image construction." The paper aims to expound on this work by including a cross comparison with Caochangdi,

an arts district founded in a rural, instead of post-industrial, space, and what these differences reveal about the development of an arts district as a place-bounded process.

Climate of Beijing:

In the recent decades, China has undergone significant economic reforms as the country moves into a market economy. Increased globalization and global influences has led both to competition as well as privatization. As the nation-state recedes in importance, cities begin competing for resources on the global network (Sassen 2011; Wang and Li 2009, 875). According to these changes, “as the national government continues to introduce market reforms and promote its cities as strategic locations to entice investors, Beijing becomes part of the global network of cities competing for investment. The Chinese political elites utilise urban space to promote the city as a rising power” (Currier 2008, 242). Culture becomes a tool for economic growth, as cities aim to attract “highly mobile investors, professional talents and élites and visitors” (Wang and Li 2009, 875). This comes at a time when support for cultural industries “is largely driven by two endogenous factors — firstly the desire of the national government to promote Chinese culture and to build ‘soft power’, and secondly the attempts of both the national and local governments to upgrade labor-intensive manufacturing to knowledge-based industries” (Ren and Sun 2012, 507). As well, recent surges in popularity of Chinese contemporary art among international art collectors has increased market values for spaces like 798 (Wang and Li 2009, 877).

With the 2008 Beijing Olympics, the focus on international reputation is further emphasized. The selling of “culture” becomes not only economically beneficial to the city, but also politically strategic. The existence of such areas of 798 can be pointed to as demonstrations of an open reform, even as the arts district becomes reintegrated into central planning and authority (Tan 2005, 119).

The History of 798:

The discourse surrounding Beijing's art districts have centered around the prominent Dashanzi art district, known internationally as the 798 Art District. Situated within the Fifth Ring Road in the northeast of the city, the area of 798 follows the model of many Western art districts in both its establishment in a post-industrial space and its progress towards commercialization. In the 1950s, the factory complex was designed and built in partnership with the Soviet Union and the German Democratic Republic to produce electronic and military equipment (Rui 2005, 164). At one time responsible for tens of thousands of workers and a beacon of a successful *danwei*, providing housing, work, social services, education and entertainment for its workers (Tan 2005, 113), the state-owned enterprise declined in profitability in the market reform period, and found many of its factories closed. Its revival as an arts district in the recent decades tells a familiar story, one echoing the transitions of industrial spaces, such as the Tate Modern in the U.K., the BAM Art District in Brooklyn, into hip, commercial enclaves studied by Western theorists (Lloyd 2005; Zukin 1995, 2010).

During the Maoist era, from 1949 to 1976, the arts were viewed as a tool to disseminate revolutionary, ideological lessons and educate the masses (Mao 1980), and thus artists needed to complete official training programs and join artist unions (Dekker 2011, 20). After the economic reforms of the Deng Xiaoping period, many Beijing artists resigned from official positions and clustered around the Yuanmingyuan area, before the government pressured the community to disband in 1995 (Wang and Li 2009, 877). That year, Sui Jianguo, the head of the Sculpture Department at the Central Academy of Fine Arts, discovered cheap, temporary studio space in then-abandoned 706 Factory in the complex (Dekker 2011, 37). He was joined by artists Huang Rui, Xu Yong, Zhao Bandi, and Yu Fan, as well as galleries, nightclubs, and publishers (Ying 2005, 26; Rui 2005, 168,). However, this existence was tenuous, as the area was planned by the city in 1993 to become a part of a

future high-tech district. The Seven Stars Group, founded in 2001 (Rui 2005, 168), controls the majority of the factories in the complex and began to exert its power around 2003 to curb the cultural activities in the area. The artists, fearing the demise of their community, began to use their international connections in publicizing the area, creating functions like the Dashanzi International Art Festival and soliciting foreign coverage, combined with local efforts on the part of Li Xiangqun, a sculptor and deputy of the Beijing Municipal People's Congress who advocated for a bill on the preservation of the area and funding (Currier 2008, 246).

Yet, this official support has not been solely a boon for the area, as “the conversion of residential and factory space into clusters, with the assistance of officials [...] means that there is a need to show return on investment. The emphasis falls on activities that generate visible returns, attract tourists and cause minimal disruption” (Keane 2009, 18). While Seven Stars agreed to accept the arts district, establishment of the Construction and Management Committee ensures that official eyes will be on the future activities, including the possibility of censorship (Currier 2008, 248). Though “the monitoring of artists by the government has caused a trend in artists and art students to quit their official jobs and move to little villages in the outskirts of Chinese large cities, in order to escape the watchful eye of the government,” the art district, ironically, has become re-appropriated by the government to serve its cultural goals (Dekker 2011, 23)

From its origins, where rent in the space averaged around 0.60RMB per square meter per day, 798 has since transformed into a bourgeois, trendy space with upscale cafés and restaurants, boutique clothing stores, and international galleries. “The 798 effect” has been likened to turning space into “a yuppie marketplace” (Keane 2009, 14), and conversations with those involved in the art world in Beijing reveal that many believe the district to be overly commercialized, mainly focused on the tourism industry, and no longer an appropriate

space for artists to work (Huang 2014; Zhou 2014), due to the fact that “space, particularly in a city plagued by overcrowding, needs to produce an asset for the global economy in order to be worth sustaining” (Tan 2005, 117).

Caochangdi Background:

It is under this shadow that Caochangdi Art District exists. The divergences of this area from the 798 model demonstrates that the development of an art district is a place-bounded process. Originally an Imperial gravesite and gardens, a village composing mainly of the families Zhang and Sun settled to maintain the graves (Ray and Mangurian 2008, 10). The tombs were destroyed during the Cultural Revolution, at which point the village became an agricultural commune (Ray and Mangurian 2008, 10). As Beijing expanded farther and farther out in the recent decades, the area was planned in the 1980s to be a part of a greenway, signaling the village, like many others surrounding the area, would be demolished at some unknown point in the future (Pei 2014; Liu Ying 2014).

Once a rural region, companies began moving into the village after the Reform and Opening period (Ray and Mangurian, 2008, 10), and from the 1990s on, villagers, following the trend of an urbanizing China, largely ceased to farm the land, opting instead to find work in the city (Pei 2014). During these years, farmland diminished both to serve the rising demand of companies and factories needing space in village, as well as the lowered demand for an agricultural way of life in the new economy. In 2000, Ai Weiwei, an internationally recognized artist with complicated relationships to the Chinese government, opted to move his studios to Caochangdi, electing to build his studio, 258 FAKE, in the southern part of town. In the following years, galleries began to move in, many into spaces also designed Ai Weiwei.

Caochangdi today is an example of one of hundreds of urban villages, or

chengzhongcun, in Beijing (Ray and Mangurian 2008, 119). With an amalgam of migrant workers, villagers, and an arts community with international ties, Caochangdi comprises of narrowed dirt streets, public restrooms, and a disordered mix of structures and construction, often illegal or extra-legal, which contribute to the lively air of a live-in village. This study aims to understand how this environment, in contrast with the post-industrial spaces often associated with arts districts, affects the development of the arts district and the relationships with its surroundings.

Methodology:

This paper uses a mixed-method research design, composing of literature review, open-ended formal interviews, casual interviews, and observation of the built environment. Caochangdi was chosen as the field site for study, as it exemplified both the trend of arts districts developing in Beijing's periphery, of which around 20 exist (Ren and Sun 2012, 510) (Figure 1). As well, Caochangdi is established enough to witness the effects of an arts district yet remains distinguished from the more commercialized 798 Arts District.

During the month of May 2014, I conducted twenty interviews, including nine with members of the art community in Caochangdi (gallery directors, gallery managers, freelance artists, design company owners, etc.) and nine with residents and workers in the village and members of the village committee and property management board, as well as those in academia specializing in the topic of urban villages and Caochangdi. These interviews ranged from 15 minutes to three hours, and took place in Beijing and were recorded by hand. Anonymity was granted when sought. The interviewees were chosen as most are stakeholders in the development of the arts district, and have daily contact with Caochangdi village. Numerous site visits were conducted in Caochangdi, as well as visits to neighboring art districts of 798, Heiqiao, and Huantie to observe everyday interactions and the built

environment of these spaces.

Academic resources

- Zhu Xiaoyang, Professor of Sociology at Peking University
- Pei Dianqing, Masters' Candidate at Peking University

Caochangdi art district resources

- Huang Si, Taikang Space media curator
- Wang Jinba, Taikang Space staff
- Liu Ya, Gallery Beijing Art Space staff
- Zhou Weiyi, Visual effects artist, Bud Vision founder
- Lin Lie, Telescope Gallery assistant
- Wang Ruoqing, freelance photographer
- ShuQiao, Caochangdi Workstation documentarian
- Zhao Mengzhuo, GalerieUrsMeile Art Director
- Informant 1, Beijing Art Now Gallery staff

Caochangdi villagers, workers, and committee staff

- Informant 2, waitress at Fodder Factory
- Informant 3, elderly man born in Caochangdi
- Informant 4, shopkeeper in Caochangdi
- Informant 5, shopkeeper in Caochangdi
- Informant 6, food cart owner
- Zhao Qun, shopkeeper and resident
- Informant 6, village committee chief

- Liu Ying, village committee staff
- Informant 7, Property Management staff

Limitations are many. The number of villagers, especially native villagers, interviewed are too few to give but a cursory understanding of the effects of the art district. Quantitative data would have boosted many arguments, but gathering the statistical data was outside the scope of this paper.

Land Ownership

To understand the topics surrounding the development of an art district in Caochangdi, one must understand the current climate of land ownership. Issues of land ownership in China are highly specific to the country and rooted in its Communist history. One tenet of CCP philosophy was the empowerment of the rural masses over landlords. Thus while urban land is state-owned and can be leased to companies and individuals for seventy-year periods, rural land is owned collectively by the members of the village and can be leased out for renewable thirty-year periods (Miller2012, 65). User rights are historically transferred, thus households are able to hold onto their lands for generations (Zhu 2014). But in urban villages, the relationship with land is more complicated as the land is collectively owned, but located on the borders of or within cities that are, often, growing larger and larger and necessitating more and more land. As “the urban–rural intersections in China are often zones of fragmented administrative control and are characterized by ambiguous jurisdiction — often divided between city governments on one hand, and rural town and village governments on the other” (Ren and Sun 2012, 509). Thus, conflicts on this periphery are common, as cities often encroach on rural spaces, demolishing towns and compensating the villagers as they convert rural land into urban land, often with enormous financial gain to

developers and officials.

In 2008, the Central Committee passed the ‘Resolution on Some Major Issues in Rural Reform and Development,’ which allows farmers to subcontract and exchange their land-use rights, thus strengthening property rights and aims to boost rural investment (Miller 2012, 69-70). The process of subcontracting, though, has been going on, in practice, by the village committee and villagers in Caochangdi since long before (Pei 2014), even though “the city government forbids the leasing and selling of land-use rights to non-villagers” (Ren and Sun 2012, 510). Regulations in the village state that land that is not farmed for two or more years becomes collectively owned once again. After the village committee collects the land, the previously agricultural space can be rented out (Pei 2014). Starting in early 2000s, artists began clustering in this urban village, often to escape the commercialized district of 798, and almost always for the then cheap rents.

Results

Conversations with the arts community, villagers and migrant residents, and expert urbanists uncover the multilayered relationship between Caochangdi as an arts district, and Caochangdi as an urban village. The tale of two villages reveals itself as one of both separation and entanglement. While the built environment and spaces of the two stand in stark contrast, the development of the arts district is paced by land ownership, legality of structures, and conceived rights to the land.

Separation between two worlds: built environment

Examination of the build environment in Caochangdi reveals the contrast between the village and the arts district. While the south side of town features the galleries and workspaces of established, often internationally-based artists, many of which designed by Ai

Weiwei, the north side boasts the narrow, hectic streets of an urban village, with its food carts, small shops, foot traffic, and the requisite villagers loitering and chatting on the street (Figure 2). Ray and Mangurian describe this setup as “one of the beauties of the recent development of Caochangdi [...]spontaneous and illegal - a kind of peoples architecture mixed with high art and architecture [...] freed from the stifling constraints of large-scale developments guided by unyielding color-coded planning guidelines” (Ray and Mangurian 2008, 119). Yet, the contrast between spaces does not tell so much a story of the mixture of the arts community and the urban village as acts as physical evidence of the separation of the two worlds. In many instances, high walls exist surrounding the gallery complexes, blocking off which space belongs to which community.

Interviews with gallery staff reveal that, though some residents of Caochangdi occasionally come into the galleries, this occurrence is infrequent at best (Lin 2014). Children often find the large vacant spaces of the galleries to be fun to play in (Pei 2014), but most villagers express little knowledge of the going-ons or the influence of the arts district (Informant 4, 5, 6, 2014). Lin Lei, a gallery staff at Telescope, one of the only galleries located within an individual storefront in the narrowed streets of the village, cite one reason for its selection of its location is so it can be more engaged with the local village (Lin 2014). Nevertheless, most galleries are located in land segregated from the markets, the commerce, and the lived-in spaces of the residents of Caochangdi. Contrasted with the commotion of the northern side of the village, the gallery areas compose of serene streets with little activity and foot traffic, with gated-off walls closing off the art world and often high-end cars parked outside.

Yet, the clear divide between the two spaces is not necessarily adversary. Unlike the model of arts-led gentrification usually seen in the Western theory, such as areas like Soho, in which residents of an impoverished area are pushed out by those with higher income moving

in to areas of high cultural capital, Caochangdi, as well as many models of arts districts in China, such as 798, is not influenced by new residents so much as tourists, both domestic and international, and those who work, but do not reside, in the area. Interviews with those in the arts community reveal the fact that, while some artists and gallery staff do rent spaces in the village, these numbers are not substantial, especially in comparison with the large population of migrants, numbering in the tens of thousands, not involved in the arts (Huang 2014;Liu Ying 2014). Unlike 798 with its large industrial spaces, the individual dwellings in Caochangdi do not provide enough space for artist studios, and those who can afford rent for compounds are often established, well-known artists fewer in numbers, lessening their impact(Zhu 2014;Shu 2014).

Rights to Space

Sharon Zukin's work (1995, 2010) examines the nuances of using culture as a marketing tool of the city as well as private interests. Using the language of culture to address issues of capital projects depoliticizes moves by developers, as "culture can also be used to frame, and humanize, the space of real estate development. Cultural producers who supply art [...] are sought because they legitimize the appropriation of space" (Zukin 1995, 22). The language of culture ties together and creates a coherent narrative and vision of public space. The marketing of this culture – typically a homogenized, highbrow vision of culture – turns it into a commodity for consumption for high-income individuals. Emphasized, as well, is how branding of the city and the rhetoric from cities and private interests aim to sell the city as to be competitive on a global scale, thus exploiting artistic capital for tourism revenue and establishing the area not only as a place to work and to live, but as a destination and place for consumption.

Caochangdi, though, challenges this conception of urban branding. Though numerous

signs around the village, put up by the village committee, dub the area “Caochangdi Art Zone” and signify the space as an international art district, the unequivocal answer, both from the arts community and the village residents, is that Caochangdi, unlike its industrial peers, is first and foremost a place to live. Huang Si, the media curator at Taikang Space, cites the *shenghuohua*, or the living culture, and the mingled nature of commerce, residence, and art as the specialty of Caochangdi, in comparison to areas like 798 (Huang 2014). Zhao Mengzhuo, art director of the Swiss-based Galerie Urs Meile, posits, “When you go outside, it’s a different environment. In 798, no one lives there at night, but in Caochangdi, people live here. It’s not only office spaces, but the feeling is different” (Zhao 2014). Liu Ying, staff at the village committee, echoes that, “As long as there are *cunmin* (villagers), the primary purpose of Caochangdi is for living” (Liu Ying 2014). When asked if Caochangdi might one day become the commercialized and touristic hub of 798, many respond that the space will not, offering the village as the one defining factor keeping Caochangdi from this fate.

In contrast, post-industrial spaces like 798, because they lack such a lived-in culture, are more prone to economic development, as “once the link between artists and archaic industrial buildings is underscored and legitimized, the resulting space becomes commercialized and, to an extent, discriminatory. The transformation of a place may generate economic returns, but in the process it results in gentrification and social exclusion” (Wang and Li 2009, 884). It is much simpler for the arts community to claim a space if that space is perceived as derelict and without residents. Spaces such as the factory complex of 798, containing mostly abandoned factories, can transfer these imagined ownership rights much easier, and the link between art and industrial spaces have already been established in the Western model of art district development. Because there are limited uses for spaces like 798, the process of taking over the space is less complicated as only certain industries can utilize the space. However, villages, in their definition, contain in themselves many functions and

modes of possibilities. A key difference that differing built environments – the post-industrial space and the urban village – bring is that, when considering the question of who has the rights to space, the urban village, with livelihoods and activity teeming outside the art world, mediates the art community's ability to assert its dominance.

Artists as part of the migrant community

According to Pei, the migrant community has begun to shape the fundamental lifestyles and perceptions of the native villagers. In the decades past, his research shows that villagers possessed a Rousseauian perception of the constitution of the collective, as inseparable from the people themselves. However, with the influx of migrants, estimated to be in the tens of thousands as compared to the around 1,000 native villagers (Liu Ying 2014; Pei 2014), the experience of living in the urban village has changed the dynamics of everyday life. Previously, Caochangdi existed more in the style of a traditional rural village, where low-level houses beckoned with open doors as everyone knew one another, and two families, the Zhang and Sun, dominated in numbers. With the arrival of migrants, and of strangers, this arrangement altered. Now, to satisfy rental demand, many entrepreneurial villagers have converted their houses to multi-story buildings four or more stories in height, with metal doors necessitating pass keys, reshaping the relationships of a previously agrarian community (Pei 2014). The strangers in the village, now vastly outnumbering natives, contribute to a changing perception of inner/outer worlds. Whereas previously, the distinction between inside and outside was less clear, this divide is wider and wider. Artists, as migrants themselves to the village, contribute, if only in small part, to the wave that is reshaping the village community.

Not only in social terms do the migrant waves alter the community at Caochangdi. An equal impact is made on economic terms. Rent in the area is rising, as proclaimed by the

majority of informants. The emphasis on renting individual property, often dozens of rooms in a single building, can be witnessed on first glance in the village, as walls, telephone poles, and most surfaces are decorated with signs advertising spaces for rent, with descriptions of whether the space has its own bathroom, or uses a public bathroom, signifying the ranges of accommodation. A resident of the village states that a typical four-story apartment can have as many as 15 rooms, or 60 rooms in total, to rent out (Zhao Qun 2014). A three to four-story house can easily generate two hundred thousand RMB per year for its landlord (Pei 2014). The income from leasing out property has produced a large sum of wealth for the 1,000 or so native villagers, who no longer have the necessity to continue farming.

The impact of the art district to the trend in rising rent is minimal compared to the impact of migrants. Galleries are most often rented on collective land, signing contracts lasting decades. This can be done directly from the village committee, or through subleases from individuals, sometimes native villagers and sometimes outsiders, who themselves rent from the village committee (Informant 7 2014). These individuals can often own rights to large tracts of land, but thus far, no developers operate in Caochangdi (Informant 7 2014; Liu Ying 2014), and most structures are built by members of the art community (Informant 7 2014). Rent collected from the collective land is used to benefit the collective, with funds going for sanitation, safety, road repair, etc. and interests distributed to the native villagers every year. One informant recalls receiving 300 RMB in the past year from the rent on collective land (Informant 3 2014). Because of collective land policies, benefits at least partially find their way back to villagers, whether through direct payments or from the improvements in the amenities of the neighborhood though this, of course, can be dampened by corruption.

Although traditional gentrification theory indicates that previous residents of a community are negatively impacted by changing social environments and rising rents,

villagers in Caochangdi, according to localized policies on land ownership, are able to capture many of the real estate benefits of an arts district. Migrant workers and residents, though, do not have the same rights to benefits, and as well suffer the brunt of rent increases.

Illegality of the land

The muddy legality of land ownership in Caochangdi is tied to the development of the arts district. Under the regulations of the Chaoyang District, collective rural land that is rented out can only be used for agricultural purposes, and no structures are allowed to be built. Following this rule, a large number of the construction, including art galleries, are illegal structures (Pei 2014). Ray and Mangurian, an architect team with a research studio in Caochangdi, estimates that 80% of the structures in the village are illegal (Figure 3). While some galleries maintain that their spaces are legal, Ai Weiwei has stated in the past that all of the structures he has designed, which include numerous, established galleries, are illegal (Ray and Mangurian 2008, 120).

The art spaces in the village typically lease the land, either directly from the village committee or as a sublease from an intermediary, entrepreneurial individual, for periods of decades (Zhao 2014). Subleases of subleases are not uncommon (Mina 2012), but perhaps because the structures in Caochangdi occupy this murky liminal space of legality, no real estate development companies operate in the area (Informant 7 2014; Liu Ying 2014). In lieu of developers, the village committee themselves as well as entrepreneurial villagers and outsiders often act as individual developers. However, this process is unlike in 798, run by a largely unified organization, in which “Seven Stars leased a large amount of land to Shenzhen Dabang, a development company, which is considered by many (including governmental representatives) to be one of the reasons why rents have increased drastically in the area” (Currier 2008, 246).

As well, the industrial properties of 798 are mainly owned by one company, the Seven Stars Group. Property management, under these terms, is simplified and easy to control. Development of the area, then, is made particularly easy for commerce, especially if the company or governmental agenda lies in profit making. In contrast to this unified grouping, the buildings of Caochangdi belong to varied layers of stakeholders. Due to the illegality of constructing structures on collective land, builders do not own their properties, nor do they own the land belonging to the collective, making the space less attractive for development companies. Individual user right, too, are scattered among the diverse set of around a thousand villagers, and thus across-the-board development is harder to achieve, slowing down, perhaps, the growth of the arts district with the growth of rental prices.

Perceived Influence of the Arts District

Residents in the village express that the arts district has little to no real influence on the village itself (Informant 1, 4, 5, 6 2014). At the most, on a broad level, that the arts district can good for the economy bringing in tourists and otherbusiness for the village restaurants and shops. As well, some believe that the arts district is able to create more employment opportunities, for maintenance and security of galleries, etc. (Zhou 2014; Liu Ying 2014). However, since the majority of the actors in the arts district are but tourists and not residents, with limited interaction with the village, this suggests that their economic impact is as well less impactful.

The Future of Caochangdi

As an urban village on the periphery as the most populous city in China, Caochangdi, like many of its neighbors, is in threat of demolition. The city government, seeking more space for its growing populace, can mark a village for demolition, and it did for the village in

2010 (Mina 2012). In the following year, it was then decreed that the village would be exempt from demolition. One informant states that the high-voltage electricity wires marking the village make the area difficult and unappealing to developers as they cannot be moved easily, which explains the lack of interest in demolition of the area, as a space is usually demolished if it is perceived to be of some value to developers (Zhou 2014). Others argue that Chaoyang District has run out of the funds needed for compensation for the villagers in the event that the village is demolished, as the city would then be responsible for paying for, per square foot, the value worth of the village (Pei 2014). And this value worth is consistently climbing in conjunction with the rising demand, and the rising rental rates in the area. Many state that the arts district, unless it achieves international importance, has little impact in terms of the city's decision to demolish the village (Liu Ying 2014), and those who work in the district pay little caution to potential demolition (Zhao 2014). And perhaps it is the village, with its density and increasing housing values, that, in a twist, that has the ability to stabilize a future for the arts district.

Nevertheless, outside the purview of the city government, many factors can dramatically shape the area of Caochangdi. If it is the rising rents that can hold off against demolition, it might also be the very same factor that can cause the alteration of the makeup of the village. Already, Caochangdi is an environment less habitable to the production of art, as all but very established artists like Ai Weiwei find it difficult to afford the increasing rent. Instead, many artists are moving their studios further and further out, to the nearby, and less developed, village of Heiqiao or Huantie, for example. Caochangdi Workstation, a workspace for documentary filmmakers, whose lease expires in 2015, is expecting a 800,000-1,000,000RMB increase in their rent, and foresees needing to relocate in order to afford space (Shu 2014). New, higher-end restaurants, such as Wine Talk and Fodder Factory, cater specifically to the arts community and its clientele, but these businesses are still too few in

number to modify the landscape of the village economy. The future of Caochangdi, still, is uncertain. Global corporation Nike has already had a ceremony hosted in Caochangdi (Wang Ruoqing2014), echoing the commercialization of 798. Though a rate of change rivaling 798 is unexpected in the area, mediated by the presence of the urban village, increased demand and increased construction could stand to alter the makeup of the population. In this process, faced by Beijing citywide, Caochangdi art district plays but a small part.

Conclusion

When examining the development of Caochangdi Art District, it is pertinent to consider the local political and historical context of the village itself. The rise of the art district and its trajectory is heavily influenced by the urban village it resides in, and the land ownership laws that govern the area. Though a cursory study of the built area would suggest that Caochangdi follows the model of its peers that, “though frequently isolated from their immediate local communities these enclaves were soon connected to wider circuits of global cultural capital,” (Gu 2012, 14) the actual relationship between the urban village and the arts district is far more nuanced. Land ownership, both politically and as a social construct, mediates the development and commercialization of the arts district as villagers and residents have a far stronger hold to the land. On the other hand artists and galleries contribute, economically and socially, to the changing relationships within the village.

Many avenues of future research could be pursued concerning Caochangdi art district. A more selective sampling of native villagers and migrant residents would be beneficial to the study to achieve further accuracy and opinions. Collecting statistical and official financial data was outside the scope of this project, though an analysis of the flow of money from the arts district could reveal the beneficiaries and losers from the presence of an arts community. As well, a comparative analysis could be conducted on neighboring art districts of Heiqiao

and Huantie, burgeoning communities in an earlier stage of development. Interurban comparisons, too, could enlighten city-specific differences in policies and outcomes.

Caochangdi, an urban village on the periphery of the city of Beijing, demonstrates that the development of an arts district can be impacted by environment, both built and social. Uniquely Chinese, at the juncture of rural and urban, Caochangdi, future uncertain, has a past of challenging a globalized model of art districts.

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Interviews:

Academic resources

Pei Dianqing, Masters' Candidate at Peking University

Zhu Xiaoyang, Professor of Sociology at Peking University

Caochangdi art district resources

Huang Si, Taikang Space media curator

Lin Lie, Telescope Gallery assistant

Liu Ya, Gallery Beijing Art Space staff

ShuQiao, Caochangdi Workstation documentarian

Wang Jinba, Taikang Space staff

Wang Ruoqing, freelance photographer

Zhao Mengzhuo, Galerie Urs Meile Art Director

Zhou Weiyi, Visual effects artist, Bud Vision founder

Informant 1, Beijing Art Now Gallery staff

Caochangdi villagers, workers, and committee staff

Liu Ying, village committee staff

Zhao Qun, shopkeeper and resident

Informant 2, waitress at Fodder Factory

Informant 3, elderly man born in Caochangdi

Informant 4, shopkeeper in Caochangdi

Informant 5, shopkeeper in Caochangdi

Informant 6, food cart owner

Informant 6, village committee chief

Informant 7, Property Management staff

Appendix

Figure 1: Map of some of Beijing's art districts (Ren and Sun 2012)

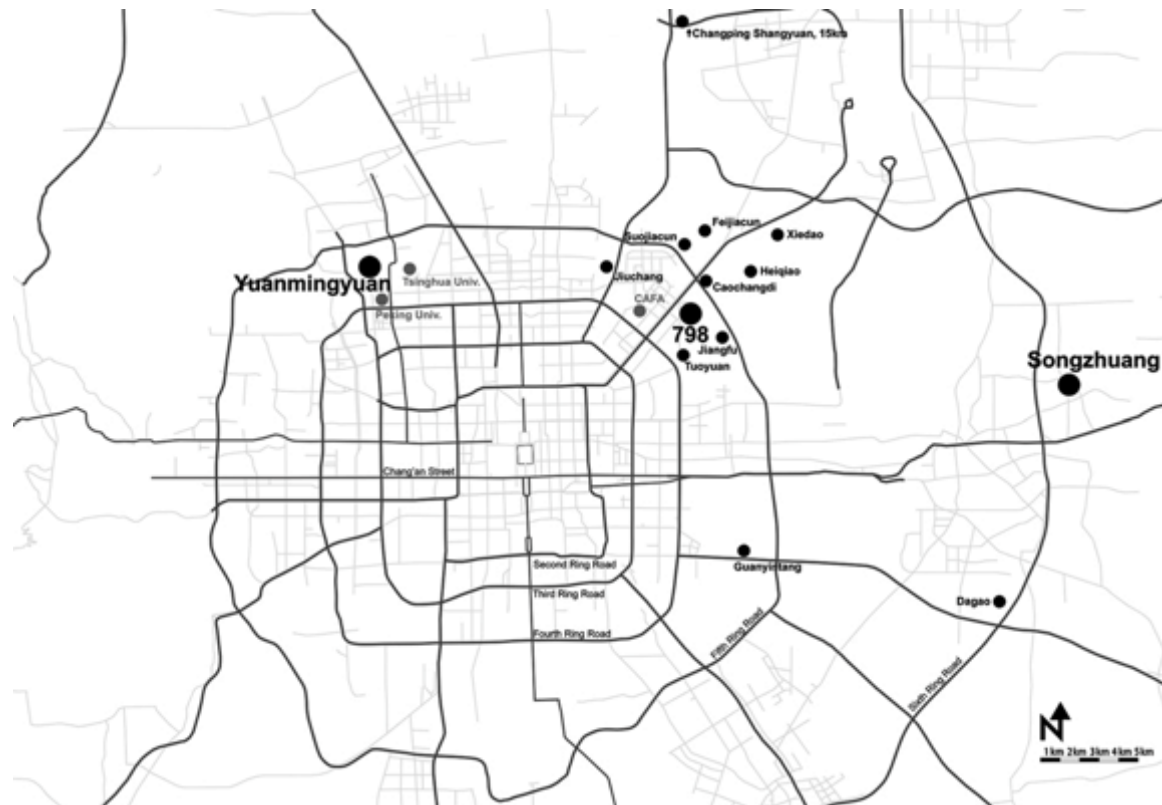


Figure 2: Comparison of street scenes from the north and the south of the village



Figure 3: Map of Caochangdi, with illegal structures in black (Ray and Mangurian)

